

Twenge, Jean M. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (Atria Books, 2017).

By Timothy Chapman

“Where iGen goes, the country goes” (15). In tracing the many demographic trends of Americans born between 1995 and 2012, Jean M. Twenge, in her book *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (Atria Books, 2017), not only examines the challenges and struggles this generation faces, but also its strengths and successes with an eye toward an inevitable future with these individuals in control.

The details and data of this generation are in the early stages of examination, but still Twenge gives a very sharp analysis of many of the trends and traits that differentiate them from their Millennial, Gen X, and Baby Boomer predecessors. Twenge coins the label “iGen” for this generation instead of the derivative “Generation Z.” This book is in many ways a follow up to her book on Millennials, *Generation Me* (2006, Atria Books, rev. updated 2014), and seeks not only to describe but also to explain to those in older generations—especially potential employers—what this generation values and how it functions.

While the advent of the internet—first in our homes, then in our hands—has certainly played an influential role in the development, socialization, and political formulations of iGen, it is by no means the sole force shaping the experience of this generation. In her first chapter, subtitled “Growing Up Slowly,” Twenge explains the iGen obsession with safety and the reluctance to take certain risks and steps toward adulthood. For instance, “12<sup>th</sup> graders in 2015 are going out [without their parents] less often than 8<sup>th</sup> graders did as recently as 2009” (19). Today’s teenagers also go out on dates less, have sex later, get their driver’s licenses later, and are less likely to have a job before college than previous generations.

Of course, some of this valuation of safety is a good thing: just over 20% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 2016 had ever tried alcohol, whereas over 55% had in 1993, and while fewer iGen 12<sup>th</sup> graders believe there is a great risk in using marijuana than did in 1980-2010, fewer of them have ever used it than 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the 1980s.

And aren’t teens today much busier than the teens of previous generations? Not really. In fact, “iGen teens...had thirty-three minutes *more* leisure time per day than GenX’ers did” (33, emphasis original). Likely some of this time is filled with checking one’s phone more than 80 times a day, as the average teen does. For all the increased virtual connectivity, iGen experiences less authentic community and suffers worse mental health effects than even the Millennials immediately before them.

Furthermore, iGen 12<sup>th</sup> graders in recent years have been more likely to identify as political independents, but less likely to be politically moderate. They are far more accepting of LGBT individuals and supportive of gay marriage, but their views on racial issues and free speech are more mixed.

Perhaps most troubling for me as a youth minister, though not surprising, is the fact that iGen is not only far less religious than previous generations (acknowledging a general trend since the Baby Boomers), it is also less spiritual, with today's 18- to 24-year-olds less likely to pray or believe in God than young adults in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. As the parents go, so go the children.

All in all, Twenge's book proves a valuable resource for Gen X and Baby Boomer parents who are raising children in a vastly different world than they grew up in, a landscape shaped more by the internet than neighborhood blacktops. It certainly will provide context for the trends and values of this generation, and, while there is certainly cause for concern and some unique interventions are necessary, there is also much reason to hope in the future for adult iGens. After all, "it's not a contest to see which generation is worse (or better); the culture has changed, and we're all in this together" (14).